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Kissinger allegedly withheld Soviet plan to violate SALT I

By Walter Andrews
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Former White House national security adviser Henry Kissinger suppressed and kept secret from other officials U.S. intelligence intercepts showing that the Soviet Union intended to violate the 1972 nuclear arms agreements, informed sources said yesterday.

The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff and Congress probably would not have supported the agreements if the electronic intercepts of radio-phone conversations between Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev and a Russian weapons expert had been known, the sources said.

The May 1972 intercept of a Brezhnev limousine telephone conversation showed that the Soviets planned the development of a new giant SS-19 nuclear missile, then unknown to U.S. negotiators, and placed a loophole in the agreements that allowed for its deployment, the sources said.

The missile resulted in a sixfold increase in the number of ballistic nuclear warheads aimed at the United States, according to the Pentagon.

The existence of the intelligence intercept has been reported, but the claim that Mr. Kissinger knew of the intercept beforehand had not.

Sources said he kept it secret in apparent fear that it would jeopardize congressional approval of the Salt I accord, of which he was the chief architect.

A spokesman for Mr. Kissinger said the charge was "a malicious untruth."

Mr. Kissinger said he does not comment on intelligence intercept information, but added, "It is a disgrace that such accusations can even be made 12 years after the event."

Last week, Richard Perle, assistant secretary of defense for international security policy, told Congress secret intelligence had shown

the Soviets deliberately intended to violate Salt I.

He did not elaborate on what the secret intelligence was, or when it became known.

Retired Adm. Elmo Zumwalt, former chief of naval operations and member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, also told the Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee this information had been kept secret from the JCS and Congress.

"I believe there was information available to the government at the time, but unknown to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, that confirmed that a violation was going to be made," the admiral said.

The deployment of the SS-19 "directly violates Salt I as Salt I was reported and explained to Congress ... during its ratification process," Adm. Zumwalt said. He declined further comment during open subcommittee session.

Yesterday, the admiral told The Washington Times he had not become aware of the information until after he retired from the Navy in July 1974.

Asked who had withheld the information, Adm. Zumwalt would only say "it was withheld at the White House level." He declined to comment further, either about the nature of the information or who had withheld it.

(Other informed sources said Mr. Kissinger knew beforehand and was the one who withheld the information from America's highest military officers.)

Asked what effect this had, Adm. Zumwalt replied: "In my judgment, if the information had been known, it would have significantly worsened the chance of approval by Congress of Salt I."

The admiral noted that the SS-19 was specifically prohibited by a unilateral statement by the United States accompanying the Salt I agreement.

"The JCS was assured that it [the unilateral statement] would be treated as part of a single entity, and it wasn't. And the White House knew it wasn't," Adm. Zumwalt said.

Dr. Kissinger has previously been reported as having been surprised by the SS-19, and as considering it evidence of Soviet "sharp practice" as far as keeping to the terms of the agreements.